

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE May 10, 2004

CONTACT: Colleen Kroll (202) 225-5235

CONGRESSMAN BOYD ANNOUNCES THE APPROVAL OF THE VA CARES PLAN

CARES Plan Includes New Community-Based Outpatient Clinic for Jackson County and ensures the Lake City Medical Center will remain a full service hospital

Washington DC - On Friday, May 7, 2004, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Anthony Principi approved the Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Plan. The plan includes a Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in Jackson County, which will serve veterans in Jackson and surrounding counties. The plan also ensures the Lake City VA Medical Center will remain a 24 hour, full service hospital.

In March of this year the VA began advertising in Jackson County for a space to house the clinic. In April, representatives from the VA met with local officials, builders, realtors, the Chamber of Commerce and a member of Congressman Boyd's staff to discuss locations for the clinic. They also visited a few possible sites. The space that will be chosen will also include an office for the Jackson County Veterans Service Officer, so veterans will not have to travel to two different locations to meet their needs.

"As the Veterans population rises in North Florida, we need to ensure they have access to quality healthcare services," said Congressman Boyd. "I worked hard to ensure that the needs of our North Florida veterans were considered in the CARES Plan. The creation of this clinic is important and beneficial to the veterans in Jackson, Liberty, Calhoun, Franklin and Gulf counties."

Over the last decade, Florida has seen a 25 percent increase in its veteran population. With this dramatic increase in Florida's veteran population, the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) has struggled to keep up with the demand for health care services in the state. Community-based outpatient clinics have sprung up throughout the state to help meet the health care needs of Florida's veterans, while VA medical centers, or hospital-based inpatient care, have not been expanded during this time.

The CARES project was implemented to collect data on veteran health care needs, veteran population projections, as well as VA facility sizes, services and locations. Once data was collected from across the nation, the VA produced the CARES Plan and awaited approval by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. With Friday's approval, the VA will begin to implement the plan and its recommendations around the country.

Congressman Boyd has been very active throughout this process making sure that the veterans of North Florida were well represented in the CARES plan. Last summer, the Congressman sat down with Undersecretary for Health for the Department of Veterans Affairs, Dr. Robert Roswell, to discuss North Florida's needs, and to urge him to not change the VA Medical Center in Lake City, Florida from a 24-hour inpatient hospital to and 8-hour a day outpatient clinic. The approved CARES plan stated that the Lake City Medical Center will remain in tact as a full service inpatient hospital.

"Now that the CARES plan has been approved, we can all be assured that our veterans in North Florida will be better taken care of," said Congressman Boyd. "At a time when many in Congress are struggling to fight budget cuts aimed at veterans programs and provide relief for overworked, understaffed VA health clinics, it made no sense for the VA to propose cutting services in an area that needs more. I am pleased that Secretary Principi has approved this plan, and understands the great need to provide health care services to veterans in North Florida."